DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 138 RC 022 267

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TITLE Spiraling towards Sustainability: Supporting Facilitator and Training Program Development through Experiential Learning.
PUB DATE 1999-10-00
NOTE 9p.; In: Selected Monographs from the Association for Experiential Education International Conference (27th, Rochester, NY, October 1999); see RC 022 262.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; *Indigenous Personnel; Mentors; *Program Development; Trainers; Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS Facilitators; *Namibia; *Train the Trainer

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the history of a 4-year evolution of the Namibian Trainer of Trainers (ToT) program from conceptualization to sustainable implementation. After 23 years of armed struggle, most Namibian adults were in need of skills and knowledge. The project had been designed to reach out to historically disadvantaged populations and support development through adult education and action. The implementing organization, World Education, soon realized that existing Namibian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) could carry out the program most effectively. Each NGO worked with World Education to tailor a support package that would best help them to reach their populations with needed services while increasing their capacity to do so. Among the support offerings most frequently accessed was the ToT program. To ensure a firm grounding in the sociopolitical and cultural context of Namibia, the design and development of ToT had to incorporate Namibian trainers. The program was designed to be true to andragogical principles; incorporate the experiential learning cycle both within and across sessions; and create active, constructive, and engaging environments. Each of the program's 4 years (cycles) is described in terms of the experiential learning spiral, as participants progressed from trainees to facilitators, then mentors, then master trainers. The mentored support of facilitator development along the experiential learning spiral is a carefully scaffolded cognitive apprenticeship. Today, Namibia has a self-replicating community of certified participatory trainers capable of designing and implementing a wide range of adult educational programs. (Contains 16 references.) (SV)

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Ref# C200598

October 1999

ED 438 138

Spiraling Towards Sustainability
Supporting Facilitator and Training Program Development through Experiential Learning

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Abstract

"Slowly, slowly catches the monkey" advises the West African proverb. Capturing the elusive "monkey" of sustainability for a training program involves the slow, strategic and supportive spiraling of facilitators through multiple levels of the Experiential Learning Cycle. This monograph explores the four-year evolution of a 10-month Namibian Training of Trainers (ToT) program from conceptualization through to independent and sustainable implementation. This process involved the careful and collaborative construction of a culturally and contextually grounded training curriculum. Most critically perhaps, it involved the development of effective facilitators and master trainers who were not only competent to conduct the training, but through an expanding, critical, and experientially-based knowledge of the curriculum were empowered to recreate the ToT while respecting and preserving its central integrity.

The Backdrop

Our story begins a few years ago in the recently independent southern African nation of Namibia. The ravages of 23 years of armed struggle against an oppressive regime have created a challenging yet inspiring environment. Long denied access to quality education (or often any education at all) the vast majority of Namibian adults are in need of skills, knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life. Meanwhile another population of Namibians who have spent decades in exile or fighting the barriers of oppression from within, return to the government, public and private sectors, committed to creating a new nation. Many of these individuals, deeply dedicated to this work, have joined or formed Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) aimed at providing support to historically disadvantaged populations. It is against this backdrop that the story of this ToT program unfolds. It would be difficult to appropriately "situate" this learning process without such a brief, albeit superficial, reference to this context. While Lave and Wenger (1991) might argue that much of situated learning is unintentional, this learning process

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RC022267

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was anything but. To ignore the socio-political context would be to run the risk of perpetuating a disempowering process (Freire, 1985), thus undermining both the historical context and the ultimate educational outcome. The development of this program required careful, critical and continual attention to this unique context.

Enter Experiential Catalysts. The project described herein was designed to reach out to historically disadvantaged populations and support development through adult education and action. As implementing organization, World Education soon realized that the most effective mechanism for accomplishing this goal would be to support existing Namibian NGOs to carry out their missions. The funds provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) were used in strategic combinations to provide grants, training and technical assistance to NGOs. Through the creation of partnerships, each NGO worked with World Education to tailor the support package that would best help them to reach their populations with needed services while increasing their ability and capacity to do so. Among the support offerings most frequently accessed was the Training of Trainers (ToT) Program. As Training Officer for World Education, one of the author's central responsibilities was to guide and nurture the development of the ToT program. This responsibility grew into a complex process that shortly revealed itself as having the potential to become a sustainable feature on the landscape of development.

Enter the Central Cast: the Namibian Trainers. To ensure a firm grounding in the socio-political and cultural context of Namibia, the design and development of the Training of Trainers program had to incorporate Namibian trainers.

Group 1 - Previous training workshops conducted by World Education had identified individuals within the NGO community who had an affinity for participatory training. Two of these individuals became part of the training design and facilitation team for the initial ToT. Fully immersed in the experience, they helped to develop a training program that would span ten months and include four two-week intensive residential training courses interspersed with three field application experiences.

Group 2 - The long-term future facilitators and master trainers were actually drawn from the first group of participants in the initial ToT Series. The 10-month series provided numerous opportunities for participants to complete full experiential learning cycles and demonstrate their developing skills and abilities. As a result, identifying potential co-facilitators was a relatively easy task. As participant growth in skills and abilities was clearly apparent to their organizations, it was a relatively simple procedure to secure their service as co-facilitators in subsequent ToTs in exchange for additional mentored skills building. Their initial experience of the ToT from the perspective of par-

ticipant provided an invaluable reference for facilitators as they began their journey around the next level of experiential learning cycle.

Theoretical Influences on an Emergent Process

As an adult educator, facilitating and contributing to this process was both informed by and confirming of a variety of theoretical frameworks. The challenge set and met was to create a training program that was true to andragogical principles (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Cross, 1980), incorporated the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1971, 1984) both within sessions and throughout the series, and acknowledged within its design central elements of traditional and emerging learning theories that speak to the importance of creating active, constructive, responsive and engaging learning environments (Piaget, 1929; Dewey, 1932; Bruner, 1966; Rogers and Freiberg, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Gardner, 1993). In addition to these theoretical frameworks, the author and process facilitator was supported by her own emerging models of collaboration and partnership (Mullinix, 1984, 1998), professional experience, and examples of ToT curricula collaboratively developed and implemented elsewhere in Africa (Kenya, Malawi, Mali). While each theoretical construct and practical activity or product would benefit from in-depth consideration and discussion, this monograph will address but one: The Experiential Learning Cycle.

Expanding the Model: From Cycle to Experiential Learning Spiral

Before embedding this story further into the Experiential Learning Cycle, it is important to specifically propose the shift in imagery that is implicit in the title of this monograph. The orientation and movement around Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle from Concrete Experience (CE) to Reflective Observation (RO) to Abstract Conceptualization (AC) to Active Experimentation (AE) is a stable, workable and important image. What is necessary to ensure its relevance to this situation is to acknowledge both movement and progress within the term cycle. In working with participants to understand this model for learning, it has often been necessary to remind them that it is an Experiential Learning Cycle, and not "Circle"; that the word cycle can evoke images of process and movement as well as return to a starting point. I often use the analogy of a bicycle wheel that begins its rotation at one point and as it returns to its initial orientation has moved through time and space. The end image here is, of course, a spiral. And thus with this tale, it is the image of a series of progressive cycles linked to form a spiral that the reader should keep in mind. To assist in maintaining this imagery, the process described will now be referred to as an Experiential Learning Spiral.

Center Stage - The ToT Series Program. To understand how the facilitators were supported through their developing roles, it is important to have an idea of their primary

reference point. The following brief description of the seven stages of the Training of Trainers Series provides a glimpse as to how the overall program integrated the Experiential Learning Spiral into its design.

ToT 1: Introduction to Participatory Training (2 weeks). Participants are provided with the opportunity to acquire and practice skills in facilitating participatory training programs, enhance their abilities to design session plans and associated support materials, and prepare them to conduct training needs assessments [Full cycle of a standard basic ToT course; theoretical and practical introduction to needs assessment (Concrete Experience through Abstract Conceptualization)].

Field Assignment 1:Conducting Training Needs Assessments (1 week) - Participants work in teams to adapt and implement the training needs assessments developed during ToT 1 and gather information that will guide the curriculum development activities of ToT 2. Field support is provided by ToT Series co-facilitators as needed [Active Experimentation with needs assessment]

ToT 2: Curriculum and Materials Development (2 weeks) - Participants acquire and practice skills in developing training curricula and associated materials [Full Cycle on training curriculum and materials development; CE - AC on pre-testing training curricula]

Field Assignment 2: Pre-Testing Training Curricula (2 weeks) - Participants work in teams to pre-test the training curricula developed during ToT 2 and gather information for ToT 3 modification activities. Field support, observation and feedback is provided by ToT series co-facilitators [Full Cycle on training implementation; AE with pre-testing training curriculum]

ToT 3: Curriculum and Materials Modification (2 weeks) - Participants are provided the opportunity to modify training curricula and materials based on field pre-testing experiences [Full Cycle on curriculum and materials modification; CE - AC on impact evaluation and post-training support]

Field Assignment 3: Assessing Training Impact and Providing Post Training Support (1 week) - Participants explore the needs and provision of follow-up support to their training participants through conducting impact evaluations or provision of technical assistance [AE with impact evaluation and post-training support].

ToT 4: Expanding Training Impact (2 weeks) - Participants evaluate, consolidate and refine training, facilitation and analysis skills and enhance their ability to expand their organizations audience for training and capacity to conduct training programs [Full cycle on ToT Series skills and knowledge consolidation].

The Plot Progresses: Facilitator Development

With the scene set and the spiraling programmatic backdrop in place, it is time to consider how the supportive development of facilitators was woven into this story in order to promote sustainable continuation and expansion of the training program (rather than merely a "happy ending"). While all of these cycles were effectively completed from 1994 to 1998, they will be described in the present tense to bring the reader closer to the action.

Cycle One, Year One - Future Facilitator as Participant. To recap: the ToT Series program is developed and pre-tested with a core team of two Namibian trainers, a Tanzanian expatriate resident World Education Trainer and a U.S.-based American Consultant. Future co-facilitators are participants in the first ToT Series implementation, contributing actively to its evaluation and on-going design [Concrete Experience with the ToT Series - participant perspective].

Cycle Two, Year Two - Facilitator as Facilitator. Four Namibian graduates of the ToT Series, certified and identified as exemplary participatory trainers, are invited to join the facilitation team. Three are able to participate fully and throughout the second implementation of the ToT (two women and one man drawn from two NGOs). The original Namibian trainers do not rejoin the team, but visit on occasion to share and compare thoughts, reactions and experiences. The ex-patriate American consultant is Training Officer-in-residence and serves as master trainer and mentor to the team. As the new team members review sessions, create additional sessions, redesign the program, and prepare to facilitate, they reflect on their experience as participants in the ToT. Training design and analysis techniques and collaborative development models introduced to them during the ToT Series are now applied to the redesign of the Series; deepening, solidifying and clarifying their understanding of both the techniques and model as well as the ToT Series itself. Through progressive implementation and in-depth feedback and preparation sessions, they begin to shift perspectives and develop as effective co-facilitators and members of a ToT facilitation team. Practical experience planning, managing and administering the ToT helps to support team members emerging management perspective. [Shift away from participant perspective; Full Cycle co-facilitator development; CE supports emerging management perspective]

Cycle Three, Year Three - Facilitator as Mentor and Manager. The three original facilitators are joined by two participants from the second ToT Series. The World Education Training Officer and Mentor conducts a Master Trainer Skills Consolidation Workshop for facilitators of the ToT Series. The three co-facilitators from the year two now take on responsibility for mentoring the two new facilitators. In addition to taking

on the roles of Master Trainer, they assume full responsibility for financial and logistical management and implementation of the ToT Series. World Education takes a step back from primary implementer to funder, supplying financial support for the ToT Series through a grant to the partner NGOs and targeted technical assistance. The World Education Training Officer transitions from central facilitator to the role of consultant, supporting the facilitators and their organizations in proposal construction, strategic planning, reporting, financial management, marketing, and national accreditation. [new co-facilitators, same as year two; Master Trainers - expand beyond co-facilitator perspective; Full Cycle Master Trainer and management development].

Cycle Four, Year Four - Facilitator as Master Trainer and Implementer. The two partner NGOs undertake implementation of the ToT Series with partial scholarship funds provided by World Education and no technical assistance. Paying and externally funded participants join the mix. A Master Trainers Skills Consolidation Workshop is held for year three co-facilitators, facilitated by the Master Trainers. The World Education Training Officer serves as consultant to this team of three Master Trainers during this workshop. The four co-facilitators from year three, now Master Trainers all, rotate management responsibilities to ensure that each develops knowledge and skills in these areas as well. They continue to plan, pursue accreditation and continue the appropriate adaptation of the ToT Series as World Education support fades out of the scene.

Beyond Cycle One, Years One through Four. Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, a network of participatory trainers that originated with the first ToT Series continues to grow in numbers and geographic scope. Over the course of these same four years, these trainers organize themselves into an official network. They conduct conferences, elect officers, institute membership dues and develop mission statements and by-laws. They manage to solidify this organization to the point where they can take over responsibility for newsletter production, the training library and publications originally supported by World Education.

This parallel organization is indicative of the contagious effect that a strategically supported experiential learning spiral can have. Many of the trainers who completed the ToT Series were not satisfied to remain as certified participatory trainers. The need to challenge themselves, remain connected and inspired, share their skills and support each other was just too great. Together, they began to search out opportunities to develop and challenge their Master Trainer colleagues to create new avenues beyond the co-facilitation of the ToT Series that would allow more trainers to join them at this higher, more professionally challenging level.

In Closing

This monograph has presented the story of the strategic support of individuals through an Experiential Learning Spiral to assume increasing responsibility for the development and implementation of a 10-month Training of Trainers course. This story follows them as they progressed through stages from participants to co-facilitators to master trainers over a four year period. The effect of their grounded experientially based development on their abilities to create a sustainable and responsive program within the context of the recently independent nation of Namibia is a tale worth hearing. It is precisely such strategic approaches that not only create participatory training programs that practice what they preach but support the development of sensitive and talented master trainers. Such master trainers are able to balance flexibility with design integrity to create programs that are appropriately responsive to participant needs while ensuring involvement, true learning and continued application. Maintaining a vibrant, sustainable training program depends less on the ability of facilitators to precisely duplicate the program than it does supporting the development of key facilitators who understand the deep purpose, structure and rationale of the training environment. The mentored support of facilitator development along this Experiential Learning Spiral is itself a carefully scaffolded cognitive apprenticeship (Brown, J.S. et al, 1989). It is only through intensive, collaborative analysis, Socratic dialogue and critical joint reflection born of a creative team process that the in-depth understanding of such a training design emerges. It is at this point that individuals transition from co-facilitators to master trainers. It is at this point that they are ready to move a training program into the future and nurture others to do the same.

As we leave this story, Namibia has well over 100 certified participatory trainers capable of designing and effectively implementing training programs to meet the educational needs of adult learners across a wide range of topics. At least 11 Master Trainers are available to train and mentor others or serve as consultants in the development of responsive training curricula at any level. While long-term continuation of the ToT is likely, it is virtually irrelevant. The existence of an indigenously adapted training program that has so carefully supported the development of a community of participatory adult trainers is a force unto itself. It will not disappear. In a very real sense, it represents not an end; but rather a beginning.

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